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No. 4

THE

PERSONAL CHARACTER OF DANTE

AS

REVEALED IN HIS WRITINGS

BY

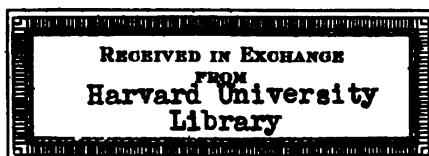
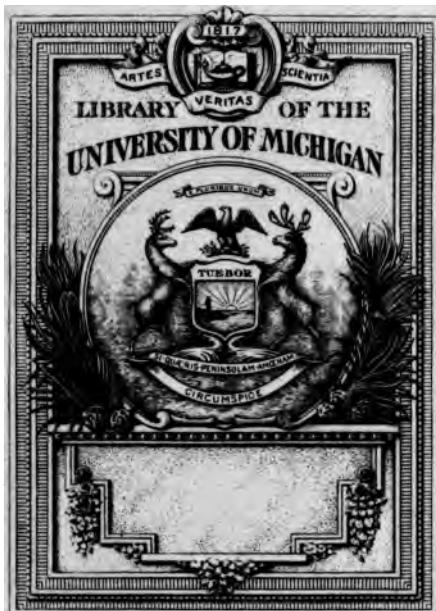
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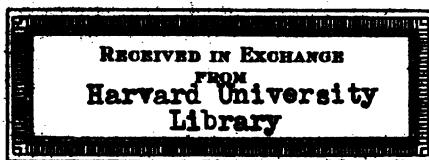
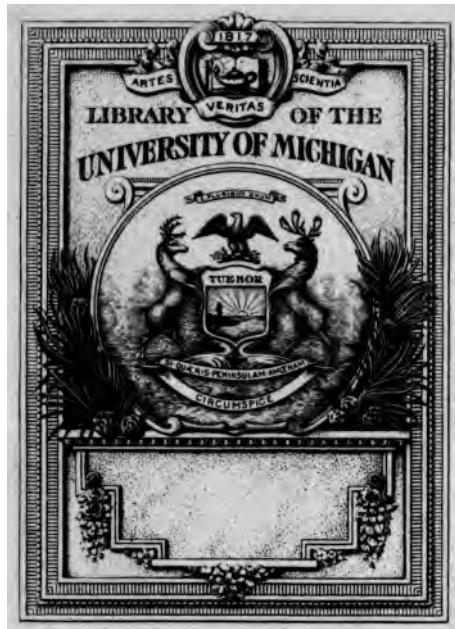
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OF WOMEN**

Fay House Monographs

No. 4

THE PERSONAL CHARACTER OF DANTE AS REVEALED IN HIS WRITINGS

**BY
LUCY ALLEN PATON**

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THIS essay has been somewhat revised since the award of the Sarah Greene Timmins Prize. The greater part of the alterations I owe to the valuable suggestions and patient help of Professor Charles Eliot Norton, for whose guidance in the study of Dante I would express my constant sense of gratitude.

L. A. P.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,
October 25, 1892.



THE PERSONAL CHARACTER OF DANTE,

AS

REVEALED IN HIS WRITINGS.

BY LUCY ALLEN PATON.

BEING

THE ESSAY BY A MEMBER OF THE CLASSES OF THE SOCIETY
FOR THE COLLEGIATE INSTRUCTION FOR WOMEN, IN
CAMBRIDGE, MASS., TO WHICH "THE SARA
GREENE TIMMINS PRIZE" WAS
AWARDED IN 1891.



THE PERSONAL CHARACTER OF DANTE.¹

ACCORDING to one of the historians of Florence there was to be found among her records of the last years of the thirteenth century a decree, the equal of which in loftiness and significance of expression few cities could boast: "Whereas it is the highest concern of a people of illustrious origin so to proceed in their affairs that men may perceive from their works that their designs are at once wise and magnanimous, it is therefore ordered that Arnolfo, architect of our commune, prepare the model or plan for the rebuilding of Santa Reparata, with such supreme and lavish magnificence that neither the industry nor the capacity of man shall be able to devise anything more grand or more beautiful; inasmuch as the most judicious in this city have declared and advised in public and private conferences that no work of the commune should be undertaken, unless the design be to make it correspondent with a heart which is of the greatest nature, because composed of the spirit of many citizens concordant in one single will."² Although the decree be apocryphal, this was the spirit which expressed itself in the sublime works that fill Florence to-day with rich associations. Italy was flushed with the intense intellectual excitement of the century. After a long period of dormant thought, France had felt the first impulse toward self-expression. By the

¹ The texts used have been Scartazzini's for the *Divina Commedia*, and Fratricelli's for the *Opere Minori*. Where a translation has been quoted, that of the *Divine Comedy* by Longfellow has been used; that of the *New Life* by Norton.

² Del Migliore, *Firenze, Città Nobilissima*, 1684, p. 6; translated in Norton's "Church Building in the Middle Ages," p. 189.

superb proportions of her architecture and poetry, and by her delicate adaptation of language to the expression of sentiment, she led the way in a movement which Sicily was not slow to follow. From Sicily the impulse extended to Italy, and filled Florence more than all other cities with the spirit of culture. Under her fostering influences Arnolfo reared the Palazzo Vecchio and the Duomo; Cimabue called to life the dead art of painting, and amid trumpets and garlands the Florentines, quick to respond to whatever appealed to them as beautiful, adorned their S. Maria Novella with the world-known Madonna. Giotto created his campanile, "the lily of Florence blossoming in stone," and proved himself even greater than his master in the art of painting: —

"Credette Cimabue nella pintura
Tener lo campo, ed ora ha Giotto il grido,
Sì che la fama di colui è oscura." ¹

But the work of Giotto which is of paramount interest to us is to be found in the chapel of the Palace of the Podestà. Here he decorated the altar-wall with a painting prompted by religious sentiment and Florentine pride. The head of Christ is designed above, and beneath this the escutcheon of Florence with angels supporting it; attendant saints are on the right and left, in front of whom stand distinguished civil authorities, and among those who lead the company is Dante. Even this figure did not save the composition from a fate kindred to that of many others of Florence's noblest works of art. At the period when she was lost to a sense of her past greatness, the Palace of the Podestà was used as a jail, and a sweep of the whitewash-brush effaced Giotto's work. Here it lay hidden until 1841, when the manifold efforts for its recovery made by lovers of Dante were rewarded, and under the care of Marini, a Florentine painter, the whitewash was removed from the fresco, and the portrait revealed in a comparatively good state of preser-

¹ *Purgatorio, xi. 94.*

vation. Fortunately, before Marini exercised his skill in retouching the portions that were defective, a drawing was made of the original by Mr. Kirkup, which was afterwards reproduced by the Arundel Society.

It is a portrait of peculiar interest, not merely from its historic value as the only known likeness of Dante taken in his lifetime, but from the sentiment always arising from the immediate association of two names of genius. That friendship guided the artist's hand, and sympathy prompted a clear interpretation of the poet's spirit, enhances its beauty and importance. It is the face of the Dante of the New Life, in the season of his youthful buoyancy and enthusiasm, with his strength untried by the struggle with life, and his joy unshadowed by the bitter prophecy: —

“Tu lascrai ogni cosa diletta
Più caramente.”¹

An atmosphere of tender simplicity rests about the face,—the simplicity that pervades the story of his love, joined to the manliness that exalts his confession. There is the poise of the head that marks the scholar, while the soft but not effeminate lines about the mouth betray the poet. Above all, there is the sweetness of the lover enthralled by the eyes of the lady whose glance made gentle those whom she regarded; together with a suggestion of the seriousness inherent in a nature that could grow to see in itself the whole human race, and in Beatrice's eyes the lode-star drawing man to God through the revelation of His will and truth.

It is a figure that the imagination can readily picture moving through the gay streets of Florence.² For although within twenty years, party strife had four times caused the

¹ *Paradiso*, xvii. 55.

² Cf. Napier, Florentine History, Bk. I., Misc. Chap. for a description of the Loggia: “chess, draughts, and dice with other amusements were carried on in sight of the public, and many had an open space in front of their houses where they exercised their horses.

expulsion in large numbers of leading persons, still "the citizens used to solace themselves with continual repasts, social meetings, and divers amusements; the city was in profound peace, and a constantly increasing prosperity enlivened the whole nation; each year in the beginning of May whole companies of either sex were to be seen in all parts of the metropolis with music, dancings, and pastimes."¹

The faults and virtues of Florence were those of youth, with its delightful fervor and sincere exaggeration. It would have been most unnatural if a man of Dante's peculiarly absorptive nature had not shared in the exuberant spirit with which the city was rife: —

" Io, che pur di mia natura
Trasmutabile son per tutte guise."²

By virtue of that very power of assimilating surrounding influences his individuality was intensified.

To appreciate his superiority to his predecessors and contemporaries, it is only necessary to compare his sonnets to his lady with those of the best of his forerunners, — Guido Guinicelli and Guido Cavalcanti. In some instances he may have derived his ideas from their poems; as, for example, it is easy to see that Guido Guinicelli's "Io vo del ver la mia donna lodare," may have given Dante a hint for his "Negli occhi porta la mia donna Amore;"³ but between the genius of Guido Cavalcanti and that of Dante there was a great gulf.⁴ Even were there no subtler indications of the character of the writer, the delicacy of expression and the confiding frankness with which he tells his story of the New Life would give more than a mere suggestion of the quality of his imagination. In a greater degree, perhaps, than any other work of

¹ Napier, Florentine History, Book i. p. 574; cf. Giov. Villani, Cronica, vii. 132, viii. 39.

² Paradiso, v. 98. Cf. also V. N., xxxvi., xxxvii.

³ V. N., Son. xi.

⁴ Cf. Cavalcanti's Sonnet, "Chi è questa che vien ch' ogn' uom la mira," and Dante's "Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare." V. N. Son. xv.

literary art, it abounds in sentiment without a tinge of sentimentalism. By its artless freedom it reveals Dante's personal character at this period with special clearness and charm, and it is a matter of delightful interest to find in Dante, the lover of Beatrice Portinari, the same traits that appear in Dante, *exul immeritus*. The Dante of the "Vita Nuova" charms by his tenderness, humility, learning, and delicate imagination; the Dante of the "Commedia" compels reverence by all these traits emphasized by the discipline of a struggle with sorrow, and our gentle poet has now become a hero, "crowned and mitred o'er himself."¹

To analyze a human character is a perplexing task. But its difficulties are somewhat diminished when the nature under consideration is of the depth and earnestness of that of Dante; the greater the earnestness of a character, the greater is its simplicity of purpose; the more intense the aim, the more closely do the individual parts group themselves around a common centre. Dante's writings are essentially of an autobiographic nature, —

“ quo fit ut omnis
Votiva pateat veluti descripta tabella
Vita senis; ”²

but the "Vita Nuova," the "Divina Commedia," and the "Convito" are those which give not only in themselves but by their comparison the surest indications of the poet's personality.

These three works represent the stages of his relation to Beatrice, which was the controlling influence of his life, and the expression of which serves to reveal most significantly the force of his imagination. From the outset Beatrice is to him of a nature more than human. Of her in her childhood it could be said, "in the words of the poet Homer: 'She seemeth not the daughter of mortal man, but of

¹ Purgatorio, xxvii. 142.

² Hor. S. II. i. 32.

God,''¹ and she remains the type of the divine when she has become a woman. When, with her two companions, she passes along the streets of Florence clad in purest white, symbol of her own purity, she salutes Dante where he stood "very timidly," "per la sua ineffabile cortesia, la quale è oggi meritata nel grande secolo."² She mingles with the work-a-day world, she has her friends, and is loyal to them too; she brightens the wedding feast, her presence is a benediction in the street,³ but with it all,—

" Dice di lei Amor: Cosa mortale
Come esser puote sì adorna e si pura?
Poi la riguarda, e fra se stesso giura
Che Dio ne intende di far cosa nova."⁴

She is "la speranza de' beati,"⁵

" Ogni dolcezza, ogni pensiero umile
Nasce nel core a chi parlar la sente,
Ond' è beato chi prima la vide."⁶

"Dicevano molti, poichè passata era: Questa non è femina, anzi è uno de' bellissimi Angeli del cielo. Ed altri dicevano: Questa è una meraviglia; che benedetto sia lo Signore che si mirabilmente sa operare."⁷ After "the Lord of Justice called this most gentle one to glory,"⁸

" Perchè vedea ch' esta vita noiosa
Non era degna di sì gentil cosa;"⁹

the transformation from the Beatrice —

" che riceve onore,
E luce sì, che per lo suo splendore
Lo peregrino spirito la mira,"¹⁰

¹ V. N. ii.

² Ib. iii.

³ Ib. v.; viii.; x. and xii.; xiv.; xxvi.

⁵ Ib. Canz. i. 28.

⁴ Ib. Canz. i. 43.

⁷ Ib. xxvi.

⁶ Ib. Son. xi.

⁹ Ib. Canz. iii. 52.

⁸ Ib. xxix.

¹⁰ Ib. Son. xxv.

to Beatrice, "loda di Dio vera,"¹ was, to the poet's mind, natural and easy. She was exalted by his fond imagination to a higher and yet higher plane, till he had indeed said of her "what was never said of any woman;" till, in poetic ecstasy, he had beheld the "glory of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory looketh upon the face of Him, *qui est per omnia saecula benedictus*,"²—who had now herself become to him the "brightness of the eternal light, the unspotted mirror of the majesty of God."³ This change in Beatrice to a completely spiritual being indicates the marvellous extent to which Dante lived in the scenes fashioned by his imagination. His nature was strangely twofold, for he both engaged eagerly in practical life, and also lived a silent existence of his own, entirely apart from the world in which he was dwelling. The soldier at Campaldino⁴ and Caprona,⁵ the member of the priorate, the ambassador to Rome, the weary, wandering exile, was a man who was not prevented, by actual experiences, from shaping the three worlds of Eternity, with an imagination purified and intensified by the conflict with sin and grief.

The striking qualities of the imagination that are most plainly manifested in the "Commedia" reveal themselves first in the "Vita Nuova." Time and race account to a great extent for a susceptible imagination, but the definiteness with which the purely fanciful becomes actual is all Dante's own. The visions with which the "Vita Nuova"⁶ is replete are the foreshadowings of those in which the poet beheld the "Paradiso." The vividness of his descriptions may perhaps be ascribed to his memory, which seems to have been so exact

¹ Inferno, ii. 103.

² V. N., xlivi.

³ Wisdom of Solomon, as quoted by Dante, Convito, Tr. iii. xv.

⁴ Aretino cites a letter of Dante's in which he says: "I was present not a boy in arms, and where I felt much fear, but in the end the greatest pleasure from the various changes of the fight."

⁵ Inferno, xxi. 95.

⁶ Convito, Tr. ii. c. xiii.

that the details of what he saw and heard were involuntarily stored away, to be used at convenience, — a trait that would lead to a certain accurate habit of mind, naturally finding expression in words like these: —

“O mente, che scrivesti ciò ch' io vidi,
Qui si porrà la tua nobilitate.”¹

Again,

“Quando io udi' questa profferta, degna
Di tanto grado, che mai non si estinguere
Del libro che il preterito rassegna.”²

Only the sounds and sights of the supernal glories of Paradise, it is beyond his memory to retain completely: —

“Ma Beatrice sì bella e ridente
Mi si mostrò, che tra quelle vedute
Si vuol lasciar che non seguir la mente.”³

Thus whatever he found in men's minds and in the life around him he appropriated unto himself, and transformed it by the Midas's touch of his fancy.

That his imagination was open to the impression of current superstitions is shown by his treatment of numbers, and his credence of their mystic properties. With special reference to the mystic number ten and to the sacred three, he arranged the poems of the “New Life” in a triple series of tens; and to the same numbers the “Divine Comedy” corresponds, in its *terza rima*, and its one hundred cantos, — or rather, perhaps, its ninety-nine cantos, thirty-three in each of the three parts, with the first canto of the “Inferno” as introduction. One of the most marked characteristics of the “Vita Nuova” is the frequent reference to the number nine as friendly to Beatrice. “Quasi dal principio del suo anno nono apparve a me, ed io la vidi quasi alla fine del mio nono.”⁴ He says

¹ Inferno, ii. 8. For the same figure cf. V. N. i.

² Paradiso, xxiii. 52.

³ Paradiso, xiv. 79: also ib. xxiii. 51.

⁴ V. N. i.

he would have made no mention of his *serventesse* containing the names of sixty gentlewomen of Florence, “se non per dire quello che componendola maravigliosamente addivenne, cioè che in alcuno altro numero non sofferse il nome della mia donna stare, se non in sul nove, tra’ nomi di queste donne.”¹ The vision of the death of Beatrice came to him on the ninth day of his illness;² she died on the ninth day of the month, in the year when, says Dante, “the perfect number was completed for the ninth time in that century in which she had been placed in this world.”³ Finally it was at the hour of nones when the vision of Beatrice moved his heart to repent of its wanderings, and all his “thoughts returned to their most gentle Beatrice.”⁴

Dante’s mind was of the quality that would draw him instinctively toward the speculations of the schoolmen, and though in the “Vita Nuova” it is out of place to look for philosophical views, it is interesting to find here the schoolmen’s abstractions affording the material for his imagination; as, for instance, when he makes little spirits actually inhabit the body of man, personifying them and endowing them with a distinct existence.⁵ But Dante was hardly less a scholar than he was poet, and knowledge was to him in truth “die hohe, die himmlische Göttin.” A passage in the “Convito” represents his conception of learning as only a scholar could form it. “Onde non si dee dicere vero filosofo alcuno che per alcuno diletto colla sapienzia in alcuna parte sia amico; siccome sono molti che si dilettano in intendere Canzoni e di studiare in quelle, e che si dilettano studiare in Rettorica e in Musica, e l’altri scienze fuggono e abbandonano, che sono tutte membra di sapienzia. Non si dee chiamare vero filosofo colui ch’ è amico di sapienzia per utilità; siccome sono li Legisti, Medici e quasi tutti li Religiosi, che non per sapere

¹ V. N. vi.

² Ib. xxiii.

³ Ib. xxx.; also xxix.

⁴ Ib. xl.

⁵ Ib. i.; xi.; xiv.; Son. vii.; xxii.

studiano, ma per acquistar moneta o dignità. . . . Siccome qui si può dire che 'l vero filosofo ciascuna parte della sapienza ama, e la sapienza ciascuna parte del filosofo, in quanto tutto a sè lo reduce, e nullo suo pensiero ad altre cose lascia distendere."¹

It is interesting to compare with this his contemporary John Villani's account of him, as showing to how great an extent, in the eyes of his associates, Dante expressed his ideal in himself. "This was a great and learned person," writes Villani, "in almost every science, though a layman; he was a consummate poet and philosopher and rhetorician; as perfect in prose and verse as he was in public speaking; a most noble orator; in rhyming excellent, with the most polished and beautiful style that ever appeared in our language up to his time or since."² He had a wide acquaintance with the classics.³ Already in the "Vita Nuova," he quotes from Virgil, Lucan, Ovid, and Horace, and twice refers to Aristotle.⁴ The passage just referred to from the "Vita Nuova,"⁵ in which he states formally some of his views on poetic form, and makes his maiden attempt at literary criticism,⁶ is in striking contrast with the description of the meeting of the same noble poets in the Limbo,⁷ and enables us to mark his growth in the years intervening between their composition.

¹ Convito, Tr. iii. c. xi.

² Villani, ix. c. 136: Tr. in Napier's Florentine History, i. c. xvi.

³ An example of this is the number of similes Dante derived from classical myths and subjects: vid. Inferno, xxx. 22; Purgatorio, ix. 34, 136; xviii. 91; xxiii. 26; xxvi. 94; xxviii. 64; Paradiso, i. 67; xii. 12; xvii. 1, 47; xxi. 6.

⁴ V. N. xxv. The frequent quotations from these classical writers and references to them in the "Commedia" are too well known to require minute reference. The same may be said of the quotations from the Bible and the indirect allusions to it with which his writings are replete.

⁵ V. N. xxv.

⁶ His praise of Guido Guinicelli (Purgatorio, xxvi. 94) is evidence of his keen critical sense.

⁷ Inferno, iv.

His formal treatment of the subject in the earlier passage is of great interest, as compared with that freedom in the world of poetry to which he had attained when the "Divina Commedia" was written. The advance of the general literary sense in Florence may partly account for this development in Dante, though he and the times so acted and reacted upon each other that it is difficult to say whether it was not his own literary growth that gave the impulse to his townsmen.

Even more than the home of letters, however, was Florence the home of art; and Dante's mind was as open to the influence of artistic beauty as to that of literature. Perhaps one of the most charming pictures of the "Vita Nuova" is that painted for us by his own simple words: "In quel giorno, nel quale si compiva l' anno che questa donna era fatta de' cittadini di vita eterna, io mi sedeaua in parte nella quale ricordandomi di lei disegnava un Angelo sopra certe tavolette."¹ It is a memorable scene,—the artist so absorbed in the labor of love prompted by his pure imagination, the men "to whom it was meet to do honor," who have been watching unperceived the work as it grows under his fingers, the quick courtesy² with which he salutes them as he becomes aware of their presence, being, as Boccaccio states, of "wonderfully composed and polished bearing," the calmness with which he apologizes for his abstraction: "Altri era testè meco e perciò pensava,"³ and then, when those who had interrupted him took their leave, the return of the poet to his work: "Onde partiti costoro, ritornaimi 'lla mia opera, cioè del disegnare figure d'Angeli."⁴

¹ V. N. xxxv.

² Convito, Tr. iv. c. xxvi. . . . a ciascun età sia bello l' essere di cortesi costumi.

³ Perhaps this bears out Villani's characterization of his manner as "a little haughty, shy, and disdainful." ix. cap. 136.

⁴ V. N. l. c.

" You and I would rather see that angel
 Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
 Would we not? — than read a fresh Inferno?"

The comparison between this angel and that sculptured on the wall of Purgatory is irresistible. .

" L' angel che venne in terra col decreto
 Della molt' anni lagrimata pace,
 Che aperse il ciel dal suo lungo divieto,
 Dinanzi a noi pareva sì verace
 Qui vi intagliato in un atto soave,
 Che non sembiava imagine che tace.
 Giurato si saria ch' ei dicesse : *Ave.*"¹

The images of Humility sculptured all along the wall of the First Circle of Purgatory, the delight of contemplating which Dante acknowledges; the images of Pride on the pavement which the sinners through Pride creeping along beneath heavy weights are forced to gaze upon, he describes with the appreciation of an artist.

" Qual di pennel fu maestro, o di stile,
 Che ritraesse l' ombre e i tratti ch' ivi
 Mirar farièno ogn' ingegno sottile?
 Morti li morti, e i vivi parean vivi.
 Non vide me' di me chi vide il vero,
 Quant' io calcai fin che chinato givi."²

Besides these instances there is a revelation of the artist within the poet in the coloring of the triple stairs leading to the first terrace of Purgatory,³ and above all in the marvellous use of color that distinguishes the description of the triumph of the church.⁴

Brought up as he was amid the gay Florentine dances and songs, Dante would have been no true son of Florence had

¹ Purgatorio, x. 34.

² Ib. xii. 64.

³ Ib. ix. 94.

⁴ Ib. xxix. See also Ib. xi. 79 for Dante's interest in art.

he been deaf to the “concord of sweet sounds,” and it is no exaggeration to say that music, far from being a mere passing diversion for him, was a life-long passion. In the “Convito” he says: “Ancora la Musica trae a sè gli spiriti umani, che sono quasi principalmente vapori del cuore, sicchè quasi cessano da ogni operazione; si è l’anima intera quando l’ode, e la virtù di tutti quasi corre allo spirito sensibile che riceve il suono.”¹ Whether the “sweet harmony” with which the youth in whitest raiment bade him adorn his confession of love to Beatrice, refers to the structure of his ballad or to its accompaniment,² we certainly have an indication of his susceptibility to music in the vision of the death of Beatrice.³ When he tells of the angels that he saw returning to heaven bearing before them a little cloud of exceeding whiteness, he stops to say: “A me parea che questi Angeli cantassero gloriosamente, e le parole del loro canto mi parea che fossero queste: *Osanna in excelsis*; ed altro non mi parea udire.” The Hosannas of angels were a favorite theme for his imagination to dwell upon. To his fancy the angels are singing Hosannas while they do the will of God in heaven.

“Come del suo voler gli angeli tuoi
Fan sacrificio a te, cantando Osanna,
Così facciano gli uomini de’ suoi.”⁴

In the Third Heaven “the lights divine” move toward him as he stands beside Beatrice.

“E dentro a quei che più innanzi appariro
Sonava *Osanna* sì, che unque poi
Di riudir non fui senza disiro.”⁵

When he met Casella “whom he woo’d to sing,” it is noticeable that he asked for song as his consolation: —

¹ Convito, Tr. ii. c. xiv.

² V. N. xii.

³ Ib. xxiii.

⁴ Purgatorio, xi. 10.

⁵ Paradiso, viii. 28; vid. also Purgatorio, xxix. 51; Paradiso, vii. i.

“Se nuova legge non ti toglie
 Memoria o uso all’ amoroso canto,
 Che mi solea quetar tutte mie voglie,
 Di ciò ti piacciā consolare alquanto
 L’anima mia, che con la sua persona
 Venendo qui, è affanata tanto :
Amor che nella mente mi ragiona,
 Cominciò egli allor sì dolcemente,
 Che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.
 Lo mio maestro, ed io, e quella gente
 Ch’ eran con lui, parevan si contenti,
 Come a nessun toccasse altro la mente.”¹

The souls of kings in the ante-Purgatory sing the *Salve regina*, and then join in the Complines’ hymn : —

“*Te lucis ante* sì devotamente
 Le uscì di bocca, e con sì dolci note,
 Che fece me a me uscir di mente.
 E l’ altre poi dolcemente e devote
 Seguitar lei per tutto l’ inno intero,
 Avendo gli occhi alle superne ruote.”²

In the passage of Lethe, —

“Quando fui presso alla beata riva,
Asperges me sì dolcemente udissi,
 Ch’ io nol so rimembrar, non ch’ io lo scriva; ”³

and again at the hymn sung by the glorious host after the blossoming of the mystic tree : —

“Io non lo intesi, e qui non si canta
 L’ inno che quella gente allor cantaro,
 Nè la nota soffersi tutta quanta.”⁴

It is a song that encourages him as he enters the Third Circle of Purgatory;⁵ the songs of the little birds are one of

¹ Purgatorio, ii. 106.

² Ib. viii. 13. For Dante’s appreciation of harmony, vid. Ib. xvi. 20.

³ Purgatorio, xxxi. 97.

⁴ Ib. xxxii. 61.

⁵ Purgatorio, xv. 38.

the joys of the Terrestrial Paradise, where the branches swayed softly by the breezes

“Non però dal lor esser dritto sparte
 Tanto, che gli augelletti per le cime
 Lasciasser d’ operare ogni lor arte;
 Ma con piena letizia l’ ore prime,
 Cantando, ricevièno intra le foglie,
 Che tenevan bordone alle sue rime,
 Tal, qual di ramo in ramo si raccoglie
 Per la pineta in sul lito di Chiassi,
 Quand’ Eolo Scirocco fuor discioglie.”¹

A “sweet melody” heralds the Triumph of the Church,² and the four and twenty Elders join in a hymn of praise;³ it is the song of the angels breathing compassion for him as he stands weighed down with shame before Beatrice, that at last melts the ice around Dante’s heart: —

“fui senza lagrime e sospiri
 Anzi il cantar di quei che notan sempre
 Dietro alle note degli eterni giri.
 Ma poichè intesi nelle dolci tempre
 Lor compatiere a me, più che se detto
 Avesser: — Donna, perchè sì lo stempre? —
 Lo giel che m’ era intorno al cor ristretto
 Spirito ed acqua fessi, e con angoscia
 Per la bocca e per gli occhi usci del petto.”⁴

As he ascends higher through the spheres of Paradise the tones of the music that he hears swell

“in tempra
 Ed in dolcezza, ch’ esser non può nota
 Se non colà dove gioir s’ insempre; ”⁵

till in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars the melodies seem to culminate in the sounding of that lyre

¹ Purgatorio, xxviii. 13.

² Ib. xxix. 22.

³ Ib. xxix. 85; also vid. xxx. 11.

⁴ Ib. xxx. 91.

⁵ Paradiso, x. 146. For the music of the spheres cf. Paradiso, vi. 126; xx. 18.

"Wherewith was crowned the sapphire beautiful."¹

But there are further indications of Dante's sympathy with the era in which he lived. The great attraction to pilgrims in this period of the Middle Ages was the Veronica, "the blessed image which Jesus Christ left to us as the likeness of his most beautiful countenance;" and there is the same reverence expressed for this in the "Vita Nuova" that appears later in the "Paradiso."² Dante takes a certain pleasure also in the grotesque, which is one of the distinguishing features of mediæval taste. The failure of the extravagant to appeal to the higher side of the imagination was not appreciated at this time. When Dante describes the grotesque figure of Minos, quaintly transformed from his heathen estate into a fiend of Christian art,³ and the devils of Malebolge, who seize with their grappling-irons, in demoniac sport, the sinners who dare to rise from the lake

¹ Paradiso, xxiii. 101. It is worthy of remark that in the Inferno no note of music is heard:

"*Beati pauperes spiritu, voci
Cantaron sì, che nol diria sermone,
Ahi! quanto son diverse quelle foci
Dalle infernali; chè quivi per canti
S' entra, e laggiù per lamenti feroci.*" (Purgatorio, xii. 110).

The only passage in the Inferno where any expression of Dante's sensibility to sweet sound can be detected is in the allusion to the voice of Beatrice, "soave e piana" (Canto ii. 56). But his sensitive ear is evidenced by the well known passage in Canto iv, where the sound of honor and honorable fame occur; in Francesca da Rimini's inimitable tale (Canto v.), the similar repetition of Amor, with which Mr. Longfellow says the verse murmurs "like the moan of doves in immemorial elms;" the rolling of the verse in Canto vii. as a prelude to the description of "the wild wheel of Fortune turning thro' sunshine, storm, and cloud," and the clearer, sweeter sound of *a* that in the Purgatorio predominates over the *o* sound of the Inferno.

Cf. also for Dante's fondness for music: Purgatorio, iv. 123, on his acquaintance with Belacqua, the maker of musical instruments; also Purgatorio, ii. 45; v. 24; xxiii. 10; xxv. 121; xxvii. 8, 55; xxviii. 41; Paradiso, iii. 122; xii. 7. A variety of musical similes also occur: Inferno, xxx. 103; Purgatorio, ix. 142; Paradiso, xiv. 118; xvii. 43; xx. 22.

² V. N. xl.; Paradiso, xxxi. 103.

³ Inferno, v.

of boiling pitch,¹ — he is simply true to the taste of the Middle Ages. Even in his selection of Virgil, as the embodiment of right Reason,² for his guide, he was influenced by the mediæval conception of Virgil as the great magician. His sympathy with that widespread characteristic of the period, — the desire for revenge, which demanded that a member of the family of one who had suffered violence should track out the offender and avenge the deed, led him at once to interpret truly Geri del Bello's threatening gestures.³ He so fully understood men's minds that he appealed to the desire for fame as not extinct even in the souls in hell.⁴ For with the growth of individualism engendered by the revival of learning, had come an intense desire for fame: a desire that Dante stamps as a stumbling-block to many, by putting no higher than the Second Heaven those who achieved noble deeds, but through love of fame, not pure love of God.

“Questa picciola stella si correda
Dei buoni spiriti che son stati attivi
Perchè onore e fama li succeda.
E quando li disiri poggian quivi
Sì disviando, pur convien che i raggi
Del vero amore in su poggin men vivi.”⁵

This man, whose fancy lived in the eternal worlds, was not self-engrossed, but answered quickly to the appeal of all that was of human interest, and possessed a wide sympathy which not only gave itself to the impulses of his time, but overflowed in tenderness towards man. His love for Guido Cavalcanti, his “first friend,”⁶ is specially noteworthy. A similarity of taste and ideas probably formed the basis of this strong friendship: each was alike scholar and

¹ Inferno. xxi., xxii.

² Inferno, i. 79. In his use of symbolism rather than allegory, as in Purgatorio, xxix., xxx., he shows his adherence to tendencies of the time.

³ Inferno, xxix. 31.

⁴ Ib. 103.

⁵ Paradiso, vi. 112.

⁶ V. N. iii.

poet.¹ Dante shows the gentlest consideration of affection for his friend where he writes of the Lady Joan and Lady Bicë, "tacendo certe parole le quali pareano da facere, credendo io che ancora il suo cuore mirasse la beltà di questa Primavera gentile."² So intimate were they that it causes surprise to Guido's father when Dante appears in the "Inferno" without his son.³ Not even the brother of Beatrice can surpass Guido in Dante's love; he is only "the friend who, according to the degrees of friendship, is the friend next in order after the first."⁴ Sir Theodore Martin suggests that there is "an indication peculiarly touching of the feeling with which this brother regarded Dante's devotion to his sister, in the request that he would write something for him 'on a lady who had died some time before,' when he must have known well that there was only one such theme on which Dante could write."⁵ But in this little incident there is a still further revelation of Dante himself, who so carefully guards his love that even Beatrice's brother must dissemble harmlessly in speaking to him of her, and counts as his friend a man of such delicacy of feeling and thoughtful consideration as this brother displayed in inviting him to a task that might in a measure console him in his grief. His relation to Cavalcanti is not the only one in which he reveals himself in the capacity of a friend. As if hungry for affection, he responds quickly to the shade of Casella coming to greet him with outstretched arms:—

"Risposemi: Così com'io t' amai
Nel mortal corpo, così t' amo sciolta;
Però m' arresto: ma tu perchè vai?—

¹ A resemblance has been traced between Cavalcanti's Song of Fortune and Dante's description of the Wheel of Fortune, Inferno, vii. 63. Cf. Longfellow's translation of the Divine Comedy, note to this passage.

² V. N. xxiv.

³ Inferno, x. 58.

⁴ V. N. xxxiii.

⁵ Martin, *Vita Nuova of Dante translated, Introduction.*

Casella mio, per tornare altra volta
 Là dove son, fo io questo viaggio,
 Diss'io; ma a te com'è tanta ora tolta?"¹

He hastens to Belacqua as soon as he recognizes him, and we can almost see the iron lips part with an indulgent smile as he discovers his lazy friend.²

But not towards his friends alone did this tenderness manifest itself.³ In the presence of human nature suffering, his heart is wrung with pity. So intensely does he feel, that he cannot help weeping when he sees the distorted forms of the Sorcerers in the Fifth Bolgia: —

“or pensa per te stesso
 Com'io potea tener lo viso asciutto
 Quando la nostra imagine da presso
 Vidi sì torta . . .

 Certo i' piangea, poggiato ad un de' rocchi
 Del duro scoglio.”⁴

Virgil's chidings by no means suggest any personal sternness on Dante's part. As right Reason Virgil can see in these sufferers only sinners from perverseness of intellect, and rebukes grief here, though he did not reprove the pity for those in the Limbo, who, being guilty of no real sin, were nevertheless cut off from hope.

“Gran duol mi prese al cor quando lo intesi,
 Perochè genti di molto valore
 Conobbi, che in quel limbo eran sospesi.”⁵

¹ Purgatorio, ii. 88.

² Ib. iv. 115. The commentators agree in characterizing Belacqua as the prince of sluggards. Cf. Scartazzini, Divina Commedia, note on this passage.

³ An interesting proof in regard to this softer side of Dante's nature, that has been often unjustly disregarded, is his frequent reference to children, and to the relation between mother and child, in his similes. Vid. Purgatorio, xv. 2; xvi. 86; xxiv. 107; xxvii. 45; xxxi. 64; Inferno, xxiii. 37; Purgatorio, xxx. 44, 79; Paradiso, i. 101; xxii. 2; xxiii. 121. Vid. also Moore's "Dante and his Early Biographers," ch. viii. p. 143, for a misunderstanding of the poet in this respect.

⁴ Inferno, xx. 20. Cf. also Inferno, vii. 36; xiii. 82; xvi. 10; xxix. 1: Purgatorio, xiii. 52.

⁵ Inferno, iv. 43.

Dante's rapid inspection of the Usurers seems to be an approach to indifference to suffering; but here again it must be remembered that Reason is the influence that calls him away: —

“ Ed io temendo nol più star cruciasse
Lui, che di poco star m' avea ammonito,
Torna' mi indietro dall' anime lasse.”¹

In striking contrast to his usual tenderness is Dante's treatment of Bocca in Antenora; the fierce hatred with which he repays the savageness of Bocca, completely in his power and defenceless, can at first sight hardly be reconciled with his habit of temper.² But Bocca, the betrayer of the Florentine standard at Montaperti, was of all traitors the most hideous to a loyal Florentine; and perhaps the excuse often made for the one occasion on which we can detect Dante in wilful deceit,³ — that any wickedness towards traitors is justifiable, — can be urged in apology for his harshness here. So great was his tenderness towards Florence, who had wronged him, that her enemies are still his. His treatment of Filippo Argenti has often been considered one of the strongest indications of the harshness of his nature.⁴ Argenti's pathetic words, “Vedi che son un che piango,” do not deter the poet from expressions that sound like those of malevolent wrath: —

“ Maestro, molto sarei vago
Di vederlo attuffare in questa broda
Prima che noi uscissimo del lago.
Ed egli a me: Avanti che la proda
Ti si lasci veder, tu sarai sazio;
Di tal disio converrà che tu goda.”

Miss Rossetti, with all her keen interpretation of Dante, says, “We really cannot help asking here, Is it possible to

¹ Inferno, xvii. 76.

² Ib. xxxii. 76.

³ Ib. xxxiii. 117.

⁴ Ib. viii.

sympathize with this delight of the disciple, or this rewarding embrace of the Master? Can that be purely righteous indignation which issues in conduct so much too like that of the offender himself?"¹ But surely, even were this a temporary lapse, we cannot characterize Dante as hard-hearted after the many instances we have already had of his tenderness. Filippo Argenti is one of the wrathful himself, and the fearful cruelties perpetrated by those like him in the Middle Ages made indifference from a gentle heart impossible toward one of the crying sins of the time. Dante's sense of justice was most stern, even where his pity was most intense. Between these qualities he felt no incompatibility, as is indicated by his appeal for the Proud, " purging away the smoke-stains of the world."

"Se di là sempre ben per noi si dice,
 Di qua che dire e far per lor si puote
 Da quei, ch' hanno al voler buona radice?
 en si dee loro aitar lavar le note,
 Che portâr quinci, sì che mondi e lievi
 Possano uscire alle stellate ruote.
 Deh! se giustizia e pietà vi disgrevi
 Tosto, sì che possiate muover l'ala,
 Che secondo il disio vostro vi levi,
 Mostrate da qual mano in ver la scala
 Si va più corto."²

In a note to his *Essay on Dante*, Mr. Lowell defends him from the accusation of partisanship: "It is worth mentioning that the sufferers in his 'Inferno' are in like manner pretty exactly divided between the two parties. This is answer enough to the charge of partiality. He even puts persons there for whom he felt affection (as Brunetto Latini) and respect (as Farinata degli Uberti, and Frederick II.)." Villani's beneficent indulgence is a trifle superfluous perhaps:

¹ Maria Francesca Rossetti, *A Shadow of Dante*, ch. vi.

² *Purgatorio*, xi. 31.

"He was well pleased in this poem to blame and cry out in the manner of poets, in some places perhaps more than he ought to have done; but it may be that his exile made him do so."¹ His hatred of injustice was deepened and intensified by his own sufferings, and his so-called bitterness² towards Florence rested on a keen sense of the injustice of which she had been guilty in his exile. He says to Ciacco,—

— "Tell me to what shall come
The citizens of the divided city,
If any there be just."³

and Ciacco replies,—

"The just are two, and are not understood there."

His bitterness is not that of unmixed scorn, but his most scathing utterances breathe wounded tenderness; let Florence treat him with all injustice, the "sweet sound of his own native land" is still dear to him. His sharp reproof begins *Fiorenza mia*.⁴ Florence is "the dearest place," even if she be taken from him, "the fair sheepfold where a lamb *he* slumbered," even if it is "cruelty that bars *him* out." "Ahi," he cries, "piaciuto fosse al Dispensatore dell' universo, che nè altri contra a me avria fallato, nè io sofferto avrei pena ingiustamente; pena, dico, d' esilio e di povertà. Pochè fu piacere de' cittadini della bellissima e famosissima figlia di Roma, Fiorenza, di gettarmi fuori del suo dolcissimo seno (nel quale nato e nudrito fui fino al colmo della mia vita, e nel quale, con buona pace di quella, desidero con tutto il cuore di riposare l'animo stanco, e terminare il tempo che m' è dato) per le parti quasi tutte, alle quali questa lingua si stende, peregrino, quasi mendicando, sono andato, mo-

¹ Villani, ix. cap. 136. Tr. in Napier's Florentine History, Book i.

² Vid. Inferno, xv. 65; Purgatorio, xiv. 50; xxiv. 80.

³ Inferno, vi. 60; 73.

⁴ Purgatorio, vi. 127; (cf. Paradiso, ix. 127;) xvii. 109; xxv. 5.

strando, contro a mia voglia, la piaga della fortuna, che suole ingiustamente al piagato molte volte essere imputata.”¹ By none but the most honorable means, however, will he return to her. It was no lack of love for Florence, rather it was stern justice, that prompted him to turn his back upon the pardon she proffered him: “Estne ista revocatio gloriosa, qua Dantes Alligherius revocatur ad patriam, per trilustrium fere perpessum exilium? Hocne meruit innocentia manifesta quibuslibet? Hoc sudor et labor continuatus in studio? . . . Absit a viro praedicante justitiam, ut, perpessus injuriam inferentibus velut benemerentibus pecuniam suam solvat! . . . Quidni? nonne solis astrorumque specula ubique conspiciam? Nonne dulcissimas veritates potero speculari ubique sub caelo, ni prius inglorium, immo ignominiosum populo, Florentinaeque civitati me reddam.”² But while the bitter tempers the sweet in his thoughts, Beatrice soothes him: —

“Consider that I am
Near unto Him who every wrong disburdens.”³

For “in the arbitrament divine” alone can Dante find perfect justice as well as perfect love.⁴ This is the union that explains to him the necessity of the “cross and passion, the precious death and burial” of the incarnate Son of God.

“L’ humana specie inferma giacque
Giù per secoli molti in grande errore,
Fin ch’ al Verbo di Dio discender piacque,
U’ la natura, che dal suo Fattore
S’era allungata, unio a sè in persona
Con l’ atto sol del suo eterno amore.

“Chè più largo fu Dio a dar sè stesso,
A far l’ uom sufficiente a rilevarsi,
Che s’ egli avesse sol da sè dimesso.
E tutti gli altri modi erano scarsi

¹ Convito, Tr. i. c. iii.

² Epis. Amico Florentino.

³ Paradiso, xviii. 5.

⁴ Vid. Inferno xxiv. 119; Paradiso, xiii. 141; xviii. 106 *et seq.*

Alla giustizia, se il Figliuol di Dio
Non fosse umiliato ad incarnarsi.”¹

It was a cardinal point in Dante's faith that sin alone rendered man “unlike the Good Supreme,” and even on the “characters diverse” of humanity he saw the stamp of a divine nature. In this way, by his recognition of more or less of the original divine creative idea stamped upon man, tempered though the wax were by the imperfect moulding influences of earth, he held the key to all love and tenderness.² From the day when under the influence of Beatrice Portinari's gracious salutation “a flame of charity possessed” Dante,³ till he gazed in Paradise at the smile of Beatrice, the Divine Will, growing sweeter as her eyes drew him up to Love Supreme, a gentle charity manifested itself continually in his spirit. His address to Guidoguerra and the other Florentines in the Inferno shows him to have been essentially a gentleman in the finest sense of the term.⁴ He could not pass by the Envious with their eyelids transfixed with iron wires, without addressing them with gracious words, because —

“To me it seemed, in passing, to do outrage,
Seeing the others without being seen.”⁵

It was in the same spirit of charity that he insisted upon sharing with others all his good things. There is a significant passage in the “Convito”⁶ that illustrates this point: “Oh beati quei pochi che seggono a quella mensa ove il pane degli Angeli si mangia e miseri quelli che colle pecore hanno comune cibo! Ma perocchè ciascun uomo a ciascun uomo è naturalmente amico, e ciascuno amico si duole del difetto di colui ch' egli ama, coloro che a sì alta mensa sono cibati, non

¹ Paradiso, vii. 28-33, 115-120. Miss Rossetti (*Shadow of Dante*, p. 223) has most ably defended Dante from the charge of irreverence that Paradiso vi. 90 would seem on the surface to imply. Cf. vii. 43.

² Ib. xiii. 64-81. Cf. Convito, Tr. iii. c. ii.

³ V. N. xi.

⁴ Inferno xvi. 52 *et seq.*

⁵ Purgatorio, xiii. 73.

⁶ Tr. i. c. i.

sanza misericordia sono invēr di quelli che in bestiale pastura veggono erba e ghiande gire mangiando." He listened to Francesca da Rimini's story with no vile leniency towards sin, but with the all-embracing love that weeps with a fallen soul, and broods pityingly over it. The pathos of the tale has no intent of alluring to seductive evil; it adds a charm to never-failing Charity that, to avoid the slightest fleck or stain upon her spotless robes, she still will love and pity those worsted in the conflict with sin.

"Mentre che l' uno spirto questo disse,
L'altro piangeva sì, che di pietade
Io venni meno sì com' io morisse;
E caddi come corpo morto cade."¹

This brings us to the most painful charge to deal with of those brought against Dante. The influence of Boccaccio's words, and of Dante's own mention of Gentucca and the *par-goletta*, have blotted his name with a stain, and have given rise to the opinion that at some time after the death of Beatrice he indulged in sensual sin. Mr. Lowell² has shown that the lady of the "Vita Nuova," whose compassion for a time consoled Dante for the death of Beatrice, is to be identified with Philosophy. By his failure to find a balm for his grief from any lower knowledge, he was led up from Philosophy to Theology. By Reason he was saved from the sin that was assailing him;³ again, the true deformity of sensual excess was revealed to him by Enlightening Grace;⁴ but the flame of passion that burned in his heart must be encountered, and through this experience his soul must pass unscathed before he could enter into spiritual bliss.

"Più non si va, se pria non morde,
Anime sante, il fuoco. Entrate in esso,
Ed al cantar di là non siate sorde."⁵

¹ Inferno, v. 139.

² Literary Essays, vol. iv., Dante.

⁴ Purgatorio, xix. 31.

³ Inferno, i.

⁵ Ib. xxvii. 10.

Before the fire of this temptation he shrank and faltered, but Reason encouraged him with sweet discourse of the light of holiness lying beyond sin and temptation, till he passed in triumph through the flame, led on by his love of purer blessedness. Then "the temporal fire and the eternal seen," secure in his freedom, with his pure desire for good attained, he needs Reason's help no longer, and the Active Life completed, he can mount where his longing takes him, to the Knowledge of the things of God. In the sight of this glory all mundane learning appears fruitless, and he stands mute with contrition before the reproaches of faithlessness to

"the loving of that good
Beyond which there is nothing to aspire to."¹

Owing to Dante's personal relations to Beatrice there seems to be every reason for putting as little symbolism as possible into the interpretation of those Cantos of the "Purgatorio" where their meeting is recounted, and for taking Beatrice's reproaches as bearing directly upon the poet's individual life. Such is his dual nature, however, that we never feel so strongly that he is the type of the entire human race as in these scenes when he stands penitently before the reproachful Beatrice. She was so completely allied with the absorbing inner life of his imagination that, with kaleidoscopic changes, she is now a complete etherealization, now the gracious type of womanhood of his early days.

"Non pur per ovra delle ruote magne,
Che drizzan ciascun seme al alcun fine,
Secondo che le stelle son compagne;
Ma per larghezza di grazie divine."

"Questi fu tal nella sua vita nuova
Virtualmente, ch' ogni abito destro
Fatto averebbe in lui mirabil pruova."

¹ Inferno, xxxi. 22.

“ Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto ;
 Mostrandogli occhi giovinetti a lui,
 Meco il menava in dritta parte volto,
 Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui
 Di mia seconda etade, e mutai vita,
 Questi si tolse a me, e diessi altri.
 Quando di carne a spirto era salita,
 E bellezza e virtù cresciuta m’era,
 Fu’ io a lui men cara e men gradita ;
 E volse i passi suoi per via non vera,
 Imagini di ben seguendo false,
 Che nulla promission rendono intera.”¹

“ Mai non t’ appresentò natura o arte
 Piacer, quanto le belle membra in ch’io
 Rinchiusa fui, e sono in terra sparte :
 E se il sommo piacer sì ti fallio
 Per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale
 Dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio ?
 Ben ti dovevi, per lo primo strale
 Delle cose fallaci, levar suso
 Diretto a me, che non era più tale.
 Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso,
 Ad aspettar più colpi, o pargoletta,
 O altra vanità con sì breve uso.”²

We have Pietro di Dante’s testimony as to the identification of this *pargoletta* with the poetic art: “Dicono questa pargoletta essere stata l’arte poetica, per seguir la quale abbia egli lasciato Beatrice, cioè, com’essi spiegano, la Teologia;”³ and we have Dante’s own statement that he was a devoted student at the time he wrote his second Canzone, that is before the year 1300, according to Fraticelli;⁴ also that after the death of Beatrice he devoted himself to the study of Philosophy;⁵ “Io, che cercava di consolare me, trovai non solamente alle mie lagrime rimedio; ma vocaboli d’autori e di scienza e di libri: li quali considerando, giudicava bene,

¹ Purgatorio, xxx. 109-132.

² Ib. xxxi. 49-60.

³ Quoted from Scartazzini, Divina Commedia, I. c.

⁴ Convito, Tr. iii. c. ix.

⁵ Ib. Tr. ii. c. xiii.

che la Filosofia, che era donna di questi autori, di questi scienze e di questi libri fosse somma cosa . . . sicchè in piccol tempo, forse di trenta mesi, cominciai tanto a sentire della sua dolcezza, che 'l suo amore cacciava e distruggeva ogni altro pensiero." Bearing these passages in mind, it is not necessary to see any contradiction between the reproaches of Beatrice and the indications afforded us by other passages of Dante's purity of heart and life. It is impossible to believe that there were any hideous corners in an imagination capable of conceiving such an ideal of beauty as that of the New Life; or could he, having a conscience burdened with impurity, say that: —

"coscienza mi assicura,
La buona compagnia che l' uom francheggia
Sotto l' asbergo del sentirsi pura?"¹

The other sin charged against our poet is pride. Certain it is that he felt himself peculiarly prone to this fault, which was in his eyes a mighty lion of over-mastering strength.² Even in the "Vita Nuova" there are signs of the supreme self-assertion which he displayed later.³ No poet before or since has arrogated to himself such a claim as that of Dante. But it must never be forgotten how Dante, with the deep sense of the brotherhood of man which we have already seen manifested in him, typified in himself the human race, and in view of this, could make his stupendous claims with propriety.⁴ That which is true of him is true of all souls born like him under fortunate stars.⁵ "E perocchè la complessione del seme può essere migliore e men buona; e la disposizione del seminante può essere migliore e men buona; e la disposizione del Cielo a questo effetto puote essere buona e migliore e ottima, la quale si varia nelle constellazioni, che continuamente

¹ Inferno, xxviii. 115.

² Ib. i. 45.

³ V. N. iii.

⁴ Cf. his claim of interest from the Virgin, Inferno, ii. 94.

⁵ Paradiso, xxii. 112.

si trasmutano, incontra che dell' umano seme e di queste virtù più e men pura anima si produce. . . . E s' ellì avviene che per la purità dell' anima ricevente, la intellettuale virtù sia bene astratta e assoluta da ogni ombra corporea, la divina bontà in lei multiplica, siccome in cosa sufficiente a ricevere quella. . . . Poichè la somma deità, cioè Iddio, vede apparecchiata la sua creatura a ricevere del suo beneficio, tanto largamente in quella ne mette, quanto apparecchiata è a riceverne.”¹ “E l' anima umana, la qual è colla nobilità della potenzia ultima cioè ragione, partecipa della divina natura a guisa di sempiterna Intelligenza; perocchè l' anima è tanto in quella sovrana potenzia nobilitata, e dinudata da materia, che la divina luce, come in Angelo, raggia in quella.”² The human souls who are *bene nati* are they to whom, brought by Reason to the Divine Light, —

“veder li troni
Del trionfo eternal concede grazia,
Prima che la milizia s' abbandoni.”³

But it was through his own experiences that Dante had discovered the way for men to enter into the Light ineffable, and his personality was too intense for him to submerge it utterly in the conception of mankind in general. He took his place calmly as one of the “well-born,” and it was upon him, as such, that the important mission devolved, of “carrying back to the mortal world” the sights and truths that had been manifested to him.⁴

“Giù per lo mondo senza fine amaro,
E per lo monte del cui bel cacume
Gli occhi della mia Donna mi levaro,
E poscia per lo ciel di lume in lume,
Ho io appreso quel che, s' io ridico,
A molti fia sapor di forte agrume.

¹ Convito, Tr. iv. c. xxi.

² Ib. Tr. iii. c. ii.

³ Paradiso, v. 115.

⁴ Paradiso, xxi. 97; cf. also Purgatorio, xxxii. 103; Paradiso, x. 27; xxxiii. 73.

Indi rispose : — Coscienza fusca
O della propria o dell' altrui vergogna,
Pur sentirà la tua parola brusca.
Ma nondimen, rimossa ogni menzogna,
Tutta tua vision fa manifesta,
E lascia pur grattar dov' è la rogna ;
Chè, se la voce tua sarà molesta
Nel primo gusto, vital nutrimento
Lascerà poi quando sarà digesta.”¹

But to sing the holy face of Beatrice irradiated by the light of the Triumph of Christ was too great a task for the sacred poem.

“ Non è pareggio da piccola barca
Quel che fendendo va l'ardita prora,
Nè da nocchier ch' a sè medesmo parca.”²

Pride boasts the prow that is audacious, but humility recognizes that there are waters too vast for it to venture upon. It was the germ of this true humility that forbade him, in his early days, to write of the departure of the blessed Beatrice, “ non sarebbe sufficiente la mia penna a trattare, come si converebbe di ciò.”³ A sure estimate of his own powers, a ready recognition of his own limitations, led him to accept his leaders, and take his place among them. He was in truth the high-minded man of his own Philosopher : δοκεῖ δὲ μεγαλόψυχος εἶναι ὁ μεγάλων αὐτὸν ἀξιῶν ἀξιος ὄν.⁴ He will take his place in the company of the five noble poets, but it shall be as sixth.⁵ The fame derived from the “Vita Nuova” and

¹ Paradiso, xvii. 112-117; 124-132.

² Ib. xxiii. 67. To this sense of the proportions of his mission, perhaps, may be attributed his evident expectation of fame to be derived from his poem, —

“ Il nome mio ancor molto non suona.” Purgatorio, xiv. 21.

³ V. N. xxix.

⁴ Aristotle, N. E. 1123 b. That his pride was not mere empty conceit, vi V. N. xxix. 17.

⁵ Inferno, iv. 100.

"Canzoni" gives him consciousness of his merits, but the honor he does not claim for himself.

"Or se' tu quel Virgilio, e quella fonte
Che spande di parlar sì largo fiume? —
Risposi lui con vergognosa fronte.
O degli altri poeti onore e lume,
Vagliami il lungo studio e il grande amore,
Che m' han fatto cercar lo tuo volume.
Tu se' lo mio maestro e il mio autore:
Tu se' solo colui, da cui io tolsi
Lo bello stile che mi ha fatto onore."¹

Before the "sweet Guide," Reason, he is quick to acknowledge his errors, and at the least rebuff he is

"tinged with the color
Which makes a man of pardon sometimes worthy."²

Such a nature as this, full of inner independence, could feel nothing but intense scorn for those who yielded to their conscious inefficiency. An instance of this is the way in which Dante handles Pope Celestine V., whom the centuries have justly despised. Boccaccio calmly described him as "an idiotic man," and Dante with scorching contempt looked upon him as "a caitiff wretch," "who made through cowardice the great refusal."³

It has been said that "the veneration of Dantophilists for their master is that of disciples for their saint." But when Dante stands before the bar of his own soul, and confesses to the sin of pride, we must believe him.

"Gli occhi (diss' io) mi fieno ancor qui tolti;
Ma picciol tempo; chè poca è l' offesa
Fatta per esser con invidia volti.
Troppa è più la paura, ond' è sospesa
L' anima mia, del tormento di sotto,
Che già lo incarco di laggiù mi pesa."⁴

¹ Inferno, i. 79.

² Purgatorio, v. 21; vid. also Inferno, iii. 79; xvii. 89; xxx. 134.

³ Inferno, iii. 60.

⁴ Purgatorio, xiii. 133; xii. 9.

Our impulse is to read his own nature in the words he applied to Virgil: —

“O dignitosa coscienza e netta,
Come t' è picciol fallo amaro morso !”¹

But if credence is given to the first part of his confession, why should it not be given to the last? Freedom from envy was one of the integral parts of his nature, as he shows us in many places. How can he be envious of his neighbors, whose

“life into the future reaches
Beyond the punishment of their perfidies !”²

Already he had learned the fleeting glory of that ambition for earthly fame which he counted as one of the forms of pride.

“Non è il mondano romore altro che un fiato
Di vento, che or vien quinci ed or vien quindi,
E muta nome, perchè muta lato.
Che fama avrai tu più, se vecchia scindi
Da te la carne, che se fossi morto
Innanzi che lasciassi il pappo e il dindi,
Pria che passin mill' anni? ch' è più corto
Spazio all' eterno, che un muover di ciglia,
Al cerchio che più tardi in cielo è torto.

Ed io a lui: — Lo tuo ver dir m' incuora
Buona umiltà, e gran tumor m' appiani.”³

With Divine Knowledge infused into the soul, —

“vidi questo globo
Tal, ch' io sorrisi del suo vil sembiante;
E quel consiglio per migliore approbo,
Che l' ha per meno; e chi ad altro pensa
Chiamar si può veracemente probo.”⁴

These are not the words of a man who has drifted smoothly into his harbor of peace, but beneath them is the conviction of a “scarred veteran of a life-long war.”

¹ Purgatorio, iii. 8.

² Purgatorio, xi. 100-108, 118.

³ Paradiso, xvii. 98.

⁴ Paradiso, xxii. 134.

Strangely like the face of Dante as Giotto has given it to us is that known from the traditional mask taken after death. The historical evidence of its genuineness is imperfect; but the resemblance between Boccaccio's well-known description of Dante's personal appearance, and the very striking similarity of the contour of this face with that of Giotto's portrait go far to establish its authenticity. The face is pre-eminently worthy of a man who knew to a greater extent than most the true significance of the warfare crowned by eternal triumph. It is a face of supreme pathos; hollow cheeks down which the tears had flowed,

“che il dolor distilla,
Quando di gran dispetto in altrui nacque;”¹

grim lips that had tasted the bitter “savor of severe compassion,”² and had proved

“come sa di sale
Lo pane altrui;”³

sunken eyes that had looked on sin, whose sight

“venendo sincera,
E più e più entrava per lo raggio
Dell' alta luce, che da sè è vera.”⁴

“There's magic in its majesty,” for it is the majesty of one who had learned from the “radiance sweet” of Divine revelation the true end of life, and had risen to a comprehension of the will of God as

“our peace; this is the sea
To which is moving onward whatsoever
It doth create, and all that nature makes.”⁵

It was this recognition of the common end of man that was, as we have seen, the main source of the sympathy which was the keystone of Dante's character. “Sympathy in its full

¹ Purgatorio, xv. 95.

² Purgatorio, xxx. 81.

³ Paradiso, xvii. 58.

⁴ Paradiso, xxxiii. 52.

⁵ Ib. iii. 85.

comprehensiveness is the proof of the strongest individuality. . . . The 'New Life' shows the first stages of that genius, the first proofs of that comprehensive sympathy which at length find their full manifestation in the 'Divine Comedy.' It is like the first blade of spring grass, rich with the promise of the golden harvest."¹ His strength was in his simplicity of aim. "Truly," he says of himself, "I have been a ship without a sail and without a rudder;"² nevertheless, such was the concentration of his purpose, drawing all his actions to itself, that he stands steady in his determination,

"come torre ferma, che non crolla
Giammai la cima per soffiar de' venti."³

The eternal verities are known, peace is attained.

"Lethe and Eunoë — the remembered dream
And the forgotten sorrow — bring at last
That perfect pardon which is perfect peace."

More than a poet's laurel rests upon his brow, for with his poet's kingship is joined a priesthood, the guerdon of "him that overcometh." By his intense individuality, born of simplicity of purpose, he has, with rare distinctness, revealed himself by his writings as a living personality. He has "bequeathed unto the future peoples" the portrait of a man self-assertive, yet of lordly humility, of keen sensitiveness and delicacy of feeling, tender, gentle, pitiful, sternly just withal, a student of men and manners,⁴ a lover of learning, of art,

¹ Norton, *Essay on the New Life*, i.

² Convito, Tr. i. c. iii.

³ Purgatorio, v. 14.

⁴ Dante's similes alone would testify to this, even if there were no other manifestations. His interest in men is shown by the wide range of subjects of which he treated in these similes, as indicated by the varied occupations from which he drew them, both among his own and other peoples. Inferno, xv. 4; xxi. 7; xv. 22; xvi. 22; xxvi. 25; Purgatorio, iv. 19; xxiv. 94; xxvi. 67; xxx. 58; xxxiii. 106; Paradiso, xiii. 131. The man in doubt, the weary, the blind, the suffering, and the infinite forms in which human character and condition manifests itself, all appealed to him. Purgatorio, iii. 72; vii. 10; ix. 64; Paradiso, xvii. 103; Purgatorio, iv. 105; xxiv. 70; xiii. 61; xvi. 10; vi. 149; xx. 21; Inferno, i. 22, 55; ii. 37; ix. 4, also Purgatorio, xxiv. 143; Inferno, xiii. 111; xv. 18; xvi. 133;

and nature in all her forms,¹ a loather of every manifestation of baseness, a practical mystic, so enraptured by his poetic vision of the supersensual that through temporal defeat he failed not to grasp the things eternal. By his sympathy, which enabled him to identify himself with the whole human race, he stands as the master pointing to an ideal of lofty aspiration, and as the guide to

“L’Amor che muove il Sole e l’ altre stelle.”

xvii. 85; xxi. 25; xxiv. 25, 112; xxx. 55, 136; Purgatorio, i. 119; ii. 11, 54, 70; iii. 69; vi. 1; x. 69; xii. 127; xiv. 27, 67; xv. 119; xix. 40; xxi. 74, 109; xxii. 67; xxiii. 1, 16; xxv. 4; xxviii. 52; xxix. 1; xxxii. 25, 130; Paradiso, v. 17; vii. 15; xvi. 14; xviii. 22, 58; xxiii. 14, 49; xxiv. 46; xxv. 64, 103, 118.

¹ For his enjoyment of inanimate nature, vid. Inferno, i. 37; ii. 1; vii. 122; xxiv. 1-15; this last is particularly significant from its blending of the human element with the poet’s enjoyment of the spring-tide of the year: Purgatorio, ii. 7; vii. 69-87; ix. 1-9, 13; xxviii. 1-33. Dante’s similes throw great light upon his personal tastes, as well as his habit of mind; his accurate memory of sights that he had seen and the picturesque power of his single epithets, render them especially forcible. Friar Pacificus illuminated his Gospel of St. John with no greater care than Dante used in elaborating the scenes he paints. Cf. particularly Purgatorio, ii. 124-129; xxvii. 76-84; Paradiso, xx. 1-6; xxiii. 1-9. His love of inanimate Nature supplied him with many similes; they were suggested to him by the sunlight (Purgatorio, xv. 16, 69; xvii. 52; Paradiso, ii. 31-34; v. 133; ix. 114), sunset and dawn (Purgatorio, v. 37; Paradiso, xiv. 70; Purgatorio, ii. 13; xxx. 22), the stars (Purgatorio, xii. 90; xxix. 91; Paradiso, xiv. 97; xv. 13; xxiv. 147), moonlight (Paradiso, xxiii. 25), mists and clouds (Inferno, xxvi. 39; xxxi. 34; xxiv. 4; Purgatorio, xvii. 1; Paradiso, xiv. 69), wind and storms (Inferno, iii. 29; v. 29; ix. 67; Purgatorio, ix. 29; xiv. 134; xxxii. 109; Paradiso, xxiii. 40), the rainbow (Paradiso, xii. 10), the snow (Inferno, xiv. 30; Purgatorio, xxix. 126; xxx. 85; Paradiso, ii. 106), the waves (Inferno, vii. 22; Purgatorio, x. 9), plant-life (Inferno, xiii. 99; Purgatorio, xviii. 54; xxiv. 145; xxv. 53; Paradiso, iv. 130), trees (Inferno, iii. 112; Purgatorio, viii. 28; xxii. 133; xxiii. 133; xxviii. 17; xxxi. 70; xxxii. 52). From birds he draws more similes than from any other creatures (Inferno, iii. 117; v. 40, 82; xvii. 127; xxii. 130; Purgatorio, xiii. 71, 122; xix. 64; xxiv. 64; xxv. 10; xxvi. 43; Paradiso, i. 48; xviii. 73; xix. 34, 91; xx. 73; xxi. 34; xxv. 19). Of insect and animal life, too, he was evidently a careful observer (Inferno, xvi. 3; Purgatorio, xviii. 58; xxvi. 34; xxxii. 133; x. 128; Paradiso, viii. 54; Purgatorio, xxvi. 134; Paradiso, v. 100; Inferno, ix. 76; xxii. 25; xxxii. 31; xvii. 22; xxv. 79; xiii. 124; xxi. 67; xxiii. 16; xii. 22; xxxii. 50; Purgatorio, iii. 79; viii. 101; xii. 1; Paradiso, iv. 127; v. 80).

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